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ABSTRACT

This document is an executive summary of a report asserting that the under-education of a body of students, known as "at-risk" youth, presents a crisis in American public education that has been overlooked by the educational reform movement of the 1980s. These youth are referred to as "at-risk" because they leave school unprepared for either further education or available jobs. Often they are prepared only for lives of alienation and dependency. If the trend continues, the result will be a labor force unsuited to post-industrial economy. Workers' basic skills, particularly at the entry level, are not sufficient for the United States to compete in a world economy. Federal aid to education has declined in real dollars by 23 percent, and is now insufficient to serve the following at-risk groups: (1) low-income children in need of pre-school education; (2) students in need of remedial programs; (3) students in need of bilingual education; and (4) youth in need of job training. However, the most formidable barriers to assisting at-risk youth do not concern a lack of money, but the failure to perceive them as in need of specific long-term attention, resistance to educational change at the state and local levels, and an absence of genuine leadership at the federal level. Figure 1 includes an outline of a Policy and Program Development Phase-Descriptor Continuum. Figure 2 includes a list of findings and recommendations. (FMW)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

America's Shame, America's Hope

Twelve Million Youth At Risk

MDC

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America's Shame, America's Hope
Twelve Million Youth At Risk

This report is an inquiry into the education reform movement of the 1980's with at-risk youth as the frame of reference. The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation asked MDC, Inc., to bring together a distinguished panel, knowledgeable in the field of educating and training youth, and to launch a study of how at-risk youth had fared in the education reform movement which began roughly with the publication of the National Commission on Excellence in Education's report, **A Nation At Risk**, in 1983. This report was written by MDC staff R.C. Smith and Carol A. Lincoln with the advice and review of the panel whose names appear below.

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Kenneth B. Clark and Associates, Inc

Jane Lee J. Eddy
Taconic Foundation

Vilma S. Martinez
Munger, Tolles and Olson, Los Angeles

Robert C. Penn
Annie E. Casey Foundation

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The following served as field research associates for the study: Judy Chynoweth, Wayne Daves, James Lott, Jerry Mabe, Robert McPherson, Anthony Redwood, Ray Reisler, Morton K. Sklar, and David M. Snedeker.

About the Panel and Authors

Kenneth B. Clark

Dr. Clark is a distinguished Professor of Psychology Emeritus of the City University of New York and President of Kenneth B. Clark and Associates, a professional consulting firm. He is the author of numerous articles and several books, including **Prejudice and Your Child** (1955), the prize winning **Dark Ghetto** (1965), and **Pathos of Power** (1975). His work on the effects of segregation on children was cited by the US Supreme Court in the historic decision of Brown vs. the Board of Education, 1954. Dr. Clark served for 20 years as a member of the Board of Regents of the State of New York.

Jane Lee J. Eddy

Ms. Eddy has been the Executive Director and Trustee of the Taconic Foundation, Inc. since 1958. She is President of Smokey House Project in Danby, Vermont and Chairman of the Youth Energy Corps in New York City. Ms. Eddy has lectured widely and testified before the US Congress on the use of worksite training for enabling young people to learn to work. She is a member of the Board of Rensselaerville Institute in Rensselaerville, New York and of the Board of the Graduate School of Political Management in New York City.

Vilma S. Martinez

Ms. Martinez is a Partner of Munger, Tolles, and Olson in Los Angeles and Chair of the Board of the Achievement Council, a nonprofit organization concerned with increasing the achievement levels of poor and minority youth. She is the former Chairman and current Member of the Board of Regents of the University of California and Vice Chairman of the Board of the Hazen Foundation. Ms. Martinez is the former President and General Counsel of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund.

Robert C. Penn

Mr. Penn is a Senior Executive with The Annie E. Casey Foundation. Before joining the Foundation, he headed his own company, Universal Management Consulting Group, Inc. and served as the first President of New York Works, Inc., a private training and placement company for low-income individuals. Mr. Penn was Senior Vice President of the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC), a nationally recognized research and demonstration firm, and the first Commissioner of Human Resources for Buffalo, New York where he also headed two other municipal departments.

Frank J. Slobig

Mr. Slobig is Director of Youth Service America, a non-profit organization which serves as the national catalyst offering financial, technical, and promotional support for youth service programs. Mr. Slobig has worked in youth programs as a policymaker, analyst, and administrator for three decades. From 1982 to 1986, he directed the Roosevelt Centennial Youth Project and prior to that served as a US Department of Labor research and evaluation officer of youth programs. He was director of a multi-service neighborhood center for Milwaukee's Inner-City Development Project, assistant director of Chicago's Archdiocesan Office of Urban Affairs, and an associate pastor of two inner-city Chicago parishes during 1961 to 1971.

Franklin H. Williams

The Honorable Mr. Williams has been the President of the Phelps-Stokes Fund since 1970. Prior to that time, he was the Director of the Urban Center at College University and Ambassador to Ghana from 1965 to 1968. He is Chairman of the Boys Choir of Harlem and the Harlem Youth Development Foundation, President of the Bishop Tutu Southern African Refugee Scholarship Fund, and Chairman of the Judicial Commission on Minorities.

R. C. Smith

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Many persons and agencies provided advice and assistance as we carried out this study. **We wish to extend special thanks to Robert Palaich, Kent McQuire, and Patty Flakus of the Education Commission of the States for the many times they helped direct us to resources and experts.** We also wish to thank the staffs of the governors, the chief state school officers, the state Job Training and Partnership Act agencies, and other state-level staff who were generous with their time and their information. Our thanks go as well to the following who helped during the early or final stages of the project:

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Foreword

Kenneth B. Clark
Chairman

The facts and the tragedy of millions of youth at risk throughout America are made disturbingly clear by this report. It cites previous studies, reports, conferences, and programs designed to reduce the extent of the risks. What is equally clear, however, is that in spite of these reports, discussions, and programs, the number of youth at risk throughout the nation has not decreased, but, rather, has increased.

The problems related to at-risk youth appear to be intractable; yet while solutions evade our grasp, society has little difficulty diagnosing the personal, educational, and related social profile of these youth. Reports define the problems in detail. It is generally agreed that a disproportionate number of at-risk youth come from the socially, racially, and economically disadvantaged groups in our society. They are seen as the human detritus of the ongoing cycle of family and group deprivation. The symptoms of this deprivation are constantly negative, but attempts to understand, control, and remedy the causes of the problem are tantalizingly evasive.

As we seek to understand and cure the fundamental underlying problems of youth at risk, we are confronted with the fact that society is not only reluctant to face, but, by its rejection, is responsible for perpetuating the problem. At-risk youth are consciously or unconsciously perceived and treated as if they were expendable. The revelation of their expendability begins in the early stages of their education where they are subjected to inferior schools and low standards of learning. Early in their lives they are programmed to be victims of the prophecy that they cannot benefit from the standards and quality which are provided for children from more privileged groups. This pattern of inferior education, of low standards and expectations, continues through secondary school and culminates in failures, dropouts, and pushouts. The victims become aware that they are ignored, rejected, and neglected, and that schools, which are the inescapable agents of society, are not preparing them to play an economically and socially constructive role. They are the unavoidable victims of the larger pattern of social, racial, and educational discrimination.

Educational literature has been replete with rationalizations for why at-risk youth cannot be

taught and cannot be held to normal standards of achievement. Statements are made to the effect that the cultural deprivation of their families blocks the ability of these young people to learn, and therefore, they cannot be expected to benefit from effective teaching. Earlier explanations for the educational retardation of at-risk, rejected youth were that they were genetically inferior. More recent diagnoses are more sophisticated. Some educators now publicly state that these young people have quite different "learning styles" which interfere with their ability to be taught basic academic subjects. These remain the unstable educational foundations that perpetuate the cycle of youth at risk.

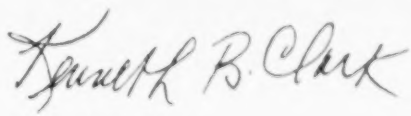
This mockery of democracy is not resolved by the occasional programs seeking to help a few of these students while ignoring the plight of the overwhelming majority of them. It is difficult to understand how a society which claims to be concerned with cost-effectiveness in its overall economy could, at the same time, continue to pay the high cost of producing increasing numbers of an unproductive underclass. An analysis of the ongoing problem of at-risk and demeaned youth reveals that this most precious of all resources, human beings, is being damaged and wasted. The bulk of the young people who are at risk are subjected to psychological genocide. They are robbed of self-esteem and the capacity to achieve. They are trivialized and relegated, at best, to ever decreasing job levels, and at worst, to correctional institutions whose per-capita cost is many times greater than the cost of effective education.

Instead of being encouraged to develop the qualities essential for a constructive role in a society, the whole pattern of their life experience is one of discouragement, despair, and internal and external self-destruction. It is a remarkable achievement when young people, born to these circumstances, can break out and assume productive lives. Yet the very presence of success stories shows that at-risk youth present not so much an intractable problem as a group whose potential society chooses to ignore. We can rescue at-risk youth for lives of opportunity if we have the will.

As one wrestles with this persistent cycle of human and social degradation, one is confronted with a fundamental proposition: The decisionmakers of our society and of our educational system do not identify or empathize with these rejected youth. We show them no respect nor the acceptance which is essential for them to develop as socialized human beings.

It appears that the very foundation of democracy is being corroded as our young people are consigned toward America's form of social concentration camps without walls. The plight of youth at risk will not be remedied until the social insensitivities of the larger society are faced and eliminated. A society which continues to erect excuses for abiding the educational inferiority of less privileged young people is perpetuating the pattern of at-risk youth and the fundamental risks of the society as a whole.

This report challenges each of us to turn America's shame into America's hope. All we need is the will to act.



Kenneth B. Clark
July 12, 1988

Sixth grader, Frank Fabars, painted "Self Portrait" while an art student at the North Central Center for Expressive Arts. The Center is a talent program housed at the Charles R. Drew Elementary School of the Dade County School District. Photo by Ryan Fike.

A crisis exists in the back rows of America's public school classrooms. It has so far eluded the full attention of the much-bruited education reform movement of the 1980's. Yet its threat to our economic future, and to the lives of millions of American youth, is present, grave, and sure to become more costly to meet, the longer we delay in meeting it.

The crisis is the under-education of a body of students presently constituting one in three in our classrooms, growing each year as a proportion of our educable young. Dominant in this body are the children of poverty—economically, culturally, racially, and ethnicly disadvantaged. They have come to be called youth "at risk" because they are at risk of emerging from school unprepared for further education or the kind of work there is to do. Often they are ready only for lives of alienation and dependency.

They are said to be failing in school, and yet it is clear that it is we who are failing to educate them. The danger this failure of education poses to these youth and to all of us grows apace. It is best described first in terms of the realities of today's and tomorrow's job market and then in terms of the young Americans who will be expected to fill these jobs.

By 1990, barely two years from now, three out of four jobs will require educational or technical training beyond high school. Projections for the year 2000—12 years from now—are that new jobs will require a work force whose median level of education is 13.5 years. That means, on the average, that the workers who fill these jobs will have to have some college training. Not to be the boss, mind you, but just to bring home a paycheck. Looked at another way, jobs in which a large proportion of workers have less than four years of high school are among the slowest growing and poorest paying in the economy, being outpaced by jobs requiring higher levels of mathematics, language, and reasoning skills—smarter jobs, then, and far more of them. The private sector demand for employment is expected to reach 156.6 million by 1990, nearly twice that of 1978.

Who will fill these jobs? Everything points to a serious labor shortage whose shadow is already upon us. The number of young people available for work is declining. In 1978, young people 16-24 years of age were 23 percent of our total population. By 1995, they will be only 16 percent. This translates to a decline of about four million. Already, labor shortages have been reported and "help wanted" signs posted in store fronts; modern, retooled manufacturing plants; and service industries.

Fewer youth, more unfilled jobs—that is the prospect. And of these youth, an increasingly higher percentage will be minorities—by the year 2000, one out of every three Americans. The inescapable conclusion is that the youths who are at risk in school today and tomorrow will have to help fill those jobs if our economy is to continue to grow. Can they do it? If we had to answer that question as matters stand today, we would have to agree with the most experienced and thoughtful people who have looked at this problem: The answer is no, not a chance.

The children of poverty, who make up a disproportionate percentage of the at-risk population, can truly be described as educationally neglected. By virtually every standardized test administered to ninth graders and above, blacks and Hispanics score at 70 percent of white scores. The average black 17-year-old reads at the same level as the average white 13-year-old. As these disparities continue, we are in danger of creating the long-feared permanent underclass of unemployed and working poor at the same time we create whole new categories of jobs to go begging. We are on the way to creating a soup-kitchen labor force in a post-industrial economy.

The underclass has already begun to take form. The rate of dropping out of school has held steady at about 25 percent since the 1960's. Yet the real, mean earnings of 20- to 24-year-old male dropouts declined 41.6 percent (from $11,210 to $6,552) between 1973 and 1984. The decline for Hispanic young men for the same period was 38.6 percent. **The decline for young black males was 61.3 percent.** Interestingly, in the same period, black male college graduates were able to raise their income by 16.6 percent. It is not difficult to see why the gap between our wealthiest and poorest people is greater than at any time since these statistics were first kept in 1947. This depressing decline in earning capacity for undereducated minorities already is making its ugly mark on family life, breaking up homes, forestalling marriage. The truth is that many young Americans no longer can afford to get married. And for too many of our youth the easy money of the drug world offers more incentive than our education system. "If you are black, Hispanic, or Indian, and live in the inner cities of this nation," writes Richard Green, chancellor of the New York City school system, "there is about a 50-50 chance you will never have a long-term permanent career."

Minority youth make up the preponderance of this group of at-risk youth, but they are not the whole story. Studies have shown that the single common

characteristic of at-risk youth is not race or economic disadvantage, but low scores on tests of basic skills—reading, writing, and computing. One-half of all the 1979 juniors who scored in the bottom fifth of the Armed Forces Qualification Test for 16- to 17-year-olds had not graduated by 1981, whereas only four percent of those in the top fifth had not graduated. The authors of the study that recently presented these figures, Gordon Berlin and Andrew Sum, observe: "If we want to reach the lowest-scoring dropouts who constitute the core of the dropout problem, we must address the syndrome that is the major cause of their leaving school: low achievement, falling behind modal grade, poor performance, and a sense that they cannot keep up with their peers."

Each year, nearly one million youth drop out of school. A million dropouts per year means that today, within our pre-school and school-age population, there are 12 million youngsters who will become dropouts by the year 2000. While a modest number—perhaps 2 million—may earn equivalency diplomas by the time they reach their 20s, the overwhelming odds are that at least as many of our high school graduates will be leaving school without the foundation necessary to obtain adequately paying and secure jobs.

We are not successfully reaching the majority of these youth. We are not successfully teaching basic skills or motivating youth to learn them. The implications for the youth are tragic as we have seen. The implications for the nation may be no less so. David T. Kearns, chairman and chief executive officer for Xerox, spoke for many American businessmen when he said: "The basic skills in our work force—particularly at the entry level—are simply not good enough for the United States to compete in a world economy."

This report is an inquiry into the education reform movement of the 1980's with at-risk youth as the frame of reference. The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation asked MDC, Inc., to bring together a distinguished panel, knowledgeable in the field of educating and training youth and to launch a study of how at-risk youth had fared in the educational reform movement which began roughly with the publication of the National Commission on Excellence in Education's report, **A Nation At Risk** in 1983. The Foundation asked MDC and the panel to look at the federal role in education reform during the 1980's and to concentrate its efforts on a survey of how the states, which assume primary responsibility for education, were performing. This report was written by MDC staff with the advice and review of the panel whose names appear inside the cover.

It is sometimes forgotten that in **A Nation At Risk**, the National Commission identified as a **federal** role focusing the national interest on education and helping fund and support efforts to protect and promote that interest. Since the enactment of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1965, the federal role in elementary and secondary education has been closely identified with youth who meet the definition of "at risk"—socio-economically disadvantaged, English-deficient, and physically and mentally handicapped. More recently, students who are homeless, victims of abuse, substance abusers, and delinquents have been added to the list of youth drawing federal concern.

Yet, in the 1980's—the very years in which public recognition of the depth of the problem has begun to grow—the federal commitment to education has declined in real dollars by 23 percent. The federal share of the total education bill has declined from 8.95 percent in 1980 to 6.27 percent in 1987. Elsewhere in this report, we examine the ways in which that commitment has shrunk. At present, the federal commitment is sufficient only to serve:

One out of every five low-income children in need of pre-school education.
Two out of every five children in need of remediation.
One out of every four children in need of bilingual education.
One out of every 20 youths in need of job training.

What is tragic at this point beyond these dismal numbers is the lack of any policy toward at-risk youth. It is as though they did not exist, or as though we really did believe they are expendable, as Dr. Kenneth Clark suggests in the foreword to this study. Despite warnings from the private sector, from economists, from advocates—indeed despite repeated public warnings from inside the administration itself—there is no federal comprehension of the problem, no strategy for its solution.

State and local spending for public schools, on the other hand, has increased. State spending has increased 26 percent beyond inflation since 1980—from $46.5 billion to $80.4 billion. Local dollars have increased 29 percent—from $40 billion to $70.5 billion. The bulk of this money, however, has gone to improving teacher salaries and lengthening the school day or school year. One study found that 43 states had strengthened high school graduation requirements, 14 states had adopted some kind of "merit" pay, and 37 had attempted to lure the best candidates among

college students into teaching through scholarships and other incentives. The researcher who produced these numbers noted: "Although standards have been made tougher, only a handful of states have appropriated additional moneys for counseling and remediation for those who will need assistance in reaching these standards." Nobody would question the wisdom of states seeking better teachers and motivating them to succeed, and most educators agree that standards in the classroom need to be higher. But enacting "instant" stricter standards without helping students already behind meet them can only be regarded as folly.

And that is exactly what we have been doing. Terrel H. Bell, former Secretary of Education and the man under whose administration **A Nation At Risk** was written recently observed that the school reform movement is benefiting 70 percent of the students. "The other 30 percent are low-income, minority students and we are still not effectively educating them."

Our report confirms this finding. We estimate that only five percent of state education funds are being used specifically for service to at-risk youth. Furthermore, there is evidence in this report that some educational reforms actually are harming at-risk youth.

In late 1987 and early 1988, we surveyed each of the states to get a sense of where they were with regard to the broad spectrum of programs for at-risk youth. Based on the results of that survey, we placed the states on a four-phase continuum beginning with bare awareness of the problem and culminating with implementation of a state-wide program for at-risk youth. Figure 1 illustrates that continuum, which can be seen as the various stages, or phases, of development of services for at-risk youth.

When MDC surveyed the states' excellence in education commissions spawned by the **A Nation At Risk** report in 1985, we found what we thought was an appalling lack of awareness of at-risk youth in these bodies. Only 15 of the 54 commissions responding from 32 states had so much as one recommendation for educational reform aimed at a group that could be described as at risk. We were told, however, in telephone conversations with commission staff and members, and other educators, that the states themselves were farther ahead. However that may be, our survey now suggests that while all of the states have moved into the earliest phase of activity (Awareness), only 14—California, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Texas, Washington and Wisconsin—can safely be said to have reached the second phase of Action. Another 11—Arkansas, Colorado, Delaware, Indiana, Kentucky, Maine, New Hampshire, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, and South Carolina—are showing real progress toward the Action Phase. So, in effect, half of the states at this point—nearing the end of this decade of focus on and funding for excellence in education—are barely aware of the existence of a problem with at-risk youth. Based on these results and those of our examination of federal involvement in the schools, we present findings and recommendations in Figure 2.

Former Secretary of Education William J. Bennett in a recent report on the educational reform movement, handed out the grade of C+ to the schools but went on to say that the nation remains at risk. "The absolute level at which our improvements are taking place is unacceptably low," he wrote. "Too many students do not graduate from our high schools and too many of those who do graduate have been poorly educated. . . Good schools for the disadvantaged and minority children are too rare, and the dropout rate among black and Hispanic youth in many of our inner cities is perilously high."

A level of improvements "unacceptably low" and a dropout rate for minorities "perilously high" seems to us to describe what we have seen with regard to service for at-risk youth in the American public schools. We would agree that the nation remains deeply at risk. We would further submit that too many of our youth are already beyond risk. We could not give the states of this nation a passing grade for what has been done for youth at risk up to now. We would have to hand out an F. At the bottom of the states' report card, we might write: "Still failing but at least beginning to pay attention in class."

For the federal government's own recent stewardship of the problem we can think of no appropriate grade. "Absent" is the school term that comes most readily to mind.

One of the more frustrating aspects of our current dilemma is that if one looks closely at the states, and at the processes and programs in place, it becomes clear that in many places progress is being made, some of it dramatic. It also is clear that we know how to teach at-risk youth and that the means to this end turns out to work for all youth. In our report, you will meet a few young people who have experienced failure and are beginning to experience success. Sadly many others have come out of the school systems of our country

with little more than vague and likely vain hopes. We also have a look at alternative school programs that work in one of the numerous American communities in which programs like these function.

If we know what to do for our at-risk youth—if we know how to educate American youth better—can we afford to do it? We are convinced that the most formidable barriers to assisting at-risk youth do not concern lack of money but failure to perceive them as in need of specific long-term attention, resistance to institutional change at the state and local levels, and an absence of genuine leadership at the federal level.

That is not to say that money is not an issue. Everything costs money and quality education is no exception. But unlike expenditures for the concrete to build roads or the armor for defense, expenditures for education carry a systematic array of expanding societal benefits from one generation to another, while the failure to spend carries penalties of a severe sort, penalties which we have been paying exorbitantly in recent years. They attach to the quality of life in America, social as well as economic. But, by themselves, the economic benefits of real school reform to all of us are worth a look.

The Hudson Institute notes: "If every child who reaches the age of seventeen between now and the year 2000 could read sophisticated materials, write clearly, speak articulately, and solve complex problems requiring algebra and statistics, the American economy could easily approach or exceed the 4 percent growth of the boom scenario. Unconstrained by shortages of competent, well-educated workers, American industry would be able to expand and develop as rapidly as world markets would allow. Boosted by the productivity of a well-qualified work force, U.S.-based companies would reassert historic American leadership in old and new industries and the American workers would enjoy the rising standards of living they enjoyed in the 1950's and 1960's."

Clearly, the national economic gains would be exponential. Each of us would share in the benefits of a healthy expanding economy. Seen this way, the investment in a better, quality education for all young Americans is probably the soundest one this nation could make. Against this order of benefits, the increased educational costs are beggared.

Even if we take the narrower view, focusing economically only on the young people themselves, the bright and dark sides of the coin for all of us show in sharp relief.

- The 973,000 dropouts from the nation's high schools in 1981 will lose $228 billion in personal earnings over their lifetime, while society will lose $68.4 billion in taxes.
- On the other hand, the Committee for Economic Development found that every $1 spent on early prevention and intervention can save $4.74 in costs of remedial education, welfare, and crime further down the road. If we could but raise the mean-tested skills of our nation's 19- to 23-year-olds by **one grade equivalent**—a goal that would be considered within reach for any computer-assisted remediation program in the country in fifty hours—lifetime earnings would increase by 3.6 percent, according to researchers Berlin and Sum, "and the likelihood of births out of wedlock, welfare dependency, and arrests would decline by 6.5 percent, 5.2 percent, and 6.2 percent respectively."

It is against this backdrop of cost, wasted money, cost, wasted people, and more cost, that we must look at a greater investment in our school system. The real question is what would it cost us to eliminate some or much of this unconscionable waste? Or, to put it another way, how much are we willing to pay now to avoid paying almost five times as much later?

The William T. Grant Foundation Commission on Work, Family, and Citizenship has recommended that the federal government invest in at-risk youth an additional $5 billion annually over the next 10 years to serve between three and four million additional youth each year. If this expenditure of $50 billion were to be invested, **it would still be less than society's loss of tax dollars from dropouts in a single school year over these youths' lifetime.**

We are talking common economic sense here, but we are also talking about equity. In the 1970's, when state budgets were fatter, a major consideration in education was equity—the need to assist the poorer school districts with the bigger burden of economically disadvantaged students. In the 1980's, the emphasis has been on excellence in education. But too often, it is as though we had forgotten equity considerations entirely. The bulk of the new money that has gone into educational reform has not been distributed through equalization formulas. Only a handful of states have adopted policies for targeting scarce at-risk-youth funds to districts with the greatest need.

An example of the pernicious nature of this failure of equity is the distribution of computers in our public

schools today. While teacher tutoring, peer tutoring, and various other components including smaller class size must be in place for a successful remediation program, computer-assisted remediation has proved itself with at-risk adults and youth inside and outside the classroom. Yet a recent survey by the Educational Testing Service shows that only a small percentage of computers in schools are being used directly for teaching basic academic skills, and that these are preponderantly in the wealthier school districts rather than in the poorer ones where they are more needed.

The time has come for us to marry the equity considerations of the 1970's with the excellence in education concerns of the 1980's and begin educating in a way intended to reach every American youth instead of only those lucky, advantaged ones in the front rows.

Inequities on the order discussed here raise the question of whether our at-risk youth are considered expendable by the society into which they have been born. Every bit of evidence we have seen goes to the conclusion that most at-risk youth can learn and will learn, given patience, the proper opportunity, and the right tools. And, perhaps, great expectations from a skillful teacher. Jaime Escalante, whose high school students from a Los Angeles barrio have been routinely passing Advanced Placement calculus exams for several years now, is a fine teacher, but he is not alone. We have the teachers, we have the tools; do we have the will?

We have not shown that we do. The Reagan Administration set as a national goal a 90 percent graduation rate by 1990. In 1982, the national graduation rate was 69.7 percent. The national graduation rate for 1986 was 71.5 percent, a bare two percentage points higher than it had been four years before. And these were years in which the federal commitment to education declined.

Do we have the public will to make this possible? The time is propitious. In most polls, the public has demonstrated a willingness to support the cost of a quality education system. And in polls conducted over the last year, two out of three Americans said they wanted the federal government to be very involved in helping people get an affordable education.

In truth, we all bear a burden for action. As businesspersons and workers, as parents, as citizens, we all owe awareness and the willingness to act to solve the complex of problems put forth here. Acting for the future of our youth is not a spectator sport. While the burden of this report goes to what happens inside the schools, education is a community affair. Significant change will not occur until parents give willing educators their support, and until we as Americans—whatever our race, gender, or age—see our own future and our country's future in the eyes of all American children.

The states have taken a small step forward toward a future in which this nation ceases to treat a large portion of its youth as though they were expendable. Yet much remains to be done and time is short. We need a leap forward, a movement of saving grace for these young people of ours, a tender of this country's regard for its youth no less than for the survival of its economic leadership. The time is now. This opportunity will not come again, nor, perhaps, will another half as full of hope.

Figure 1.
Policy and Program Development Phase-Descriptor Continuum

Pre-Awareness

- General lack of public discussion. Awareness only of a "dropout problem," but not any specific group at high risk of becoming dropouts. Concerns center on one or more sub-groups, such as "teen-age parents."
- School reform measures aimed at college-bound students. At this stage, problems of students described in terms of "truancy" or other terms implying the student is at fault.
- Schools operate with non-collaborative attitudes toward other community agencies. No attempt to involve those parents or social agencies in the community concerned with youth in school, such as drug counseling agencies and JTPA.
- Overriding philosophy that all children start at the same place in their education and need only have the lessons presented to them, with individual failure to learn attributed largely to lack of effort.
- No policy or legislation dealing with at-risk youth as a special group in need of long-term, special attention. Some programs exist, but no state effort to coordinate them or even to recognize them as applicable to a generic group of students.

PHASE I. Awareness

- General discussion occurring among political and educational leaders with some carryover to the general public. The term "at-risk youth" used popularly.
- School reform still focuses generally on successful students. Some awareness that special attention must be paid to a group of students who are not succeeding and are at risk. Dropout prevention becomes a goal.
- Some awareness of the need for collaboration between schools and other community agencies, frequently expressed in the formation of task forces to study the problems of at-risk youth or to coordinate efforts to assist them.
- Softening of the attitude that all children begin their education with the same advantages. Some concomitant efforts here and there to affect early childhood differentials with pre-kindergarten or kindergarten enrichment programs for poor youth.
- Scattered statements of policy, from the governor's office, the office of the chief educational officer, or one or more of the task forces. Generally these call for attention to the problems of at-risk youth but typically are not enforceable and do not constitute "state policy" as such.
- Scattered legislation, usually directed at sub-groups of at-risk youth such as teen-age parents, offenders, drug abusers or others that are of special interest to certain state agencies or officials. Legislated allocations vary from none (simple empowerment of the localities to fund programs) to modest. No comprehensive legislative acts.
- Some increase in program initiatives, often involving national or state demonstrations, and a marked increase in local programming for at-risk youth.
- Preliminary efforts to quantify the problem and some census-taking to determine the extent of programmatic effort.

PHASE II. Action

- Full-scale discussion by the state political and educational leadership and broad public discussion as well. May be accompanied by the beginning of a public relations campaign designed to make citizens aware of the implications of the at-risk problem for the economy of the state.

- Better understanding of the proper configuration of true school reform. Awareness that tightening academic requirements must go hand in hand with remediation for those students not succeeding under the old requirements.
- Serious efforts at collaboration, such as involving parents in the educational effort of their children, use of private sector mentoring, and joint programming utilizing federal (JTPA, Chapter I, Vocational Education, etc.) funds along with state and/or local money.
- Recognition that a considerable number of youth in public schools are, for one reason or another, at risk of failure to graduate or of emerging from school unprepared for a working career, and that this problem is associated with poverty although not limited to the children of the poor.
- Serious progress in state policy-setting, involving inevitably, the office of the governor. Leadership statements of a policy nature, although not necessarily constituting enforceable, state-wide policy.
- Significant, although not comprehensive, state-wide legislation likely to be labeled for "at-risk youth"—although sub-groups may continue to be targeted—and to involve major state funding.
- Widespread state and local programming for at-risk youth, often involving school-to-work and usually involving remediation in the middle school grades and even pre-school.
- Beginning awareness of the need for restructuring in both the elementary and secondary grades, by which is meant some fundamental rethinking of the delivery of education, usually involving some individual teaching (including computer-assisted education) and sometimes involving experiments with basic changes in the way the schools are run.
- Beginning awareness of the need to consider additional reforms in the distribution of state funds to assure that funds for poorer districts actually serve at-risk youth specifically.

PHASE III. Consolidation

- Full awareness by educational and political leadership of the economic, social, and human costs at-risk youth represent. Full public discussion.
- Development and emplacement of comprehensive, state-wide policy to assist at-risk youth, which includes clear goals and strong mechanisms to enforce program accountability.
- Passage of comprehensive legislation for at-risk youth, along with sufficient funding to make it possible to put policy and planning into effect beyond pilot communities.
- Broad range of program initiatives reaching all sub-groups of at-risk youth and falling within the range of policy planning done for the state.
- Full consideration of the issue of restructuring and equalization, and determination of the degree to which these reform measures should be enacted in the state.
- Deep involvement of the schools with parents and with other social agencies in the community.

PHASE IV. Implementation

- Implementation of all legislation, policymaking, and planning for at-risk youth.
- Implementation of restructuring and equalization measures.
- Full collaboration between schools and parents and social agencies in the community.

Figure 2.
Findings

- Awareness that the problems of at-risk youth cannot be solved solely by measures designed to assist advantaged youth has grown among the educational and political leadership of the states.
- Discrete, scattered initiatives on behalf of at-risk youth can be found in all of the states, but often they are funded on a pilot basis without guarantees that success will result in funding for either continuation or replication.
- Although data exist on various sub-categories of at-risk youth, differences in collecting style make it impossible to add the numbers to arrive at an estimate of the size of the at-risk population in each state.
- While 45 states report having legislation bearing on the problems of one or more sub-groups of the at-risk population, most of it is piecemeal in nature, typically supporting a limited number of pilot programs. Funding for programs specifically targeted to at-risk youth rarely exceed 5 percent of state education expenditures or affect more than 10 percent of the at-risk population.
- While policy statements from commissions, task forces, governors' offices, or state education departments can be found in 23 states in either draft or final form, no single state has an over-arching policy addressed to at-risk, school-age youth.
- Lack of public concern for the problems of at-risk youth stands as a barrier to building comprehensive approaches to serving them.
- The potential to serve at-risk youth through the federally funded Job Training Partnership Act—the nation's current national effort at job training and employment—has not been fully realized in the majority of the states. Nevertheless, national funding for JTPA is insufficient to reach more than a small percentage of at-risk youth.
- In many states, information about programs for at-risk youth is not shared well at the state level or between the state and local levels.
- Although state funding for education has increased since 1980, resources continue to be used disproportionately for students who begin their education better off.
- The at-risk problem is both an urban and rural problem. In the cities, funding cutbacks have worsened a grim situation and in rural areas of the South, Southwest, and West, little is in place to serve at-risk youth.
- Little real evaluation or monitoring is being undertaken on programs for at-risk youth outside the limited scope of nationally sponsored demonstrations. In consequence, while many interesting-sounding programs exist, little information is available upon which to base judgments of effectiveness.
- Evidence mounts that certain features of the excellence-in-education movement are contributing to the dropout problem.
- The educational excellence reform movement has largely overlooked the need to modify instructional techniques for at-risk youth.

Recommendations

- That Congress and the President restore the federal partnership in education by increasing the federal funding commitment to at least 10 percent of all expenditures for pre-school, elementary, and secondary education (at current levels, this would translate to an increase in federal expenditures from approximately $10 billion to nearly $18 billion) and that the additional funds be earmarked for programs and services directly affecting at-risk youth.
- That Congress pass legislation charging the Department of Education with responsibility and authority for coordinating and managing the federal government's response to the at-risk problem, including the development of a common definition of "at-risk youth" to be used in designing and targeting future programs. This legislation should establish a data base for purposes of documentation, monitoring, and evaluation, and Congress should provide sufficient funds to enable the Department of Education to promote widespread replication of successful program strategies for at-risk youth.
- That the Department of Education undertake an analysis of the unintended and negative consequences for at-risk youth of current education reform and existing job training and vocational programs, and report the results and recommendations for change to Congress by September, 1989.
- That the White House lead a national crusade to make sure that the equity considerations of the 1970's are joined with the excellence in education concerns of the 1980's in a campaign to raise the educational attainment level in our public schools for all of our children.
- That every governor who has not already done so establish a special standing commission on at-risk youth to investigate the nature of the problem in the state, examine the unintended consequences for at-risk youth of current state education reform and job-training policy, and recommend a concerted program of action that includes clear and progressively challenging goals for addressing the problem similar to the continuum of effort described in this report. The membership of the commission should include representatives from all state agencies serving at-risk youth, business and industry, local schools, parents' groups, community-based organizations, and the public. Governors in states where such a commission or task force is already in place should review membership to assure representation of each of these groups.
- That governors vest responsibility in and provide resources to a single cabinet-level agency or arm of state government to implement and coordinate the recommendations produced by the standing commissions.
- That as part of its work, each state commission/responsible agency undertake a campaign to make the public aware of the needs of at-risk youth and the danger this failure of education poses to the state's and the nation's future.
- That this campaign also include a program to educate schools, Private Industry Councils, and community organizations about federal, state, and local programs and practices already in place for at-risk youth and about models of cooperative intervention.
- That each state legislature pass comprehensive legislation establishing state policy for meeting the educational needs of at-risk youth and for increasing the graduation rate each year until it reaches 90 percent. Until the graduation rate equals or exceeds this 90 percent, 60 percent of each new state dollar earmarked for education should be spent for instruction and services for at-risk youth and the localities should match this level of effort wherever possible.
- That the governor and legislature of each state develop measures that will assure equity between richer and poorer school districts in the distribution of funds targeted for educational reform.
- That the commissioner or superintendent of education of each state develop recommendations for the state board and the legislature on ways to facilitate the restructuring of the schools to better meet the needs of at-risk youth, and that the legislatures provide incentives to local districts to carry out restructuring measures that will benefit the neediest students in the district.

MDC, Inc.

Founded in 1967, MDC, Inc. is a private non-profit research and demonstration organization concerned with strengthening the workforce and the economy through innovations in employment and economic development policy and programs. In 1985, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation funded MDC's study, **Who's Looking Out For At-Risk Youth**, which reported on the level of attention paid to at-risk youth by the nation's educational excellence commissions.

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